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**The Division of Labor Among University  
Libraries**

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## THE DIVISION OF LABOR AMONG UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

Address by Mr. J. T. Gerould, of Princeton University, former  
Librarian of the University of Minnesota

*Mr. Gerould*—The matter which I wish to bring before you this morning is a detail of the very point made by Dr. Capen, and I wish that what I say may be considered in that sense.

For a number of years, it has been my annual task to collect and to distribute the statistics of our larger university libraries; and while, owing to varying methods of accounting, the results are never entirely commensurate or satisfactory, studied through a period of years the figures are capable of yielding some interesting conclusions.

They show, for example, that the largest university library, that of Harvard, has nearly doubled in size in the last eight years and that it added 87,500 to its collections during the last year; that Chicago, Columbia, Cornell, Illinois and Yale have, during the eight years, added in excess of 200,000 volumes, and California, Leland Stanford, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Princeton, have each added in the neighborhood of 100,000.

As a result of this accelerated growth in the aggregate of the collections, in the amount of money available both for purchase and for administration, our libraries, particularly in the larger institutions, are attaining a size which is respectable; though there are still too many universities which have been unable to expand their resources to the point where they can provide even for the legitimate demands of undergraduate instruction, to say nothing of supplying the facilities for higher study.

The problem that these institutions are facing is a serious one, and with the increasing cost of books and the widening range of the curriculum, it is one that must be faced and solved, if our university instruction is to be worthy of its name. It is not the province of this paper to attempt to deal with this phase of university administration but rather to inquire whether in the institutions with a larger budget, able to make more generous provision for their libraries, we are getting a maximum result from the money spent.

It is very seldom that one who undertakes to carry on research work is not confronted, at some point in his investigations, by the fact that he is unable to complete it to his own and his colleagues' satisfaction, because he is unable to secure, either in the library of his own institution or in any of the others to which he has access, some reference which to him is vital. Too frequently this causes discouragement and prevents the completion of studies of real value. If he does publish he is likely to find that, through his failure to consult the citation for which he has sought, his results have been secured at an earlier date, by some Dane or Russian, or they are vitiated by some discovery with which he should have been acquainted.

Through the system of interlibrary loans, it is possible for a scholar, working at any institution, to secure needed books from almost any other,

provided that he or his institution will pay the cost of transportation. There is no method by which he may know, however, where the particular book or periodical which he needs is to be found. It is only by writing to one institution after another that he can, if he is fortunate, secure the reference for which he seeks. It is the frequent experience of every librarian and of the scholars whom he is attempting to serve, that, try as faithfully as he may, a copy of the book cannot be found. It may exist, concealed in some smaller institution to which it has not occurred to him to apply, or it may not be in any American library.

The remedy for the first condition is to be found in the preparation of regional lists of periodicals, such as the so-called Midwestern list, representing the resources of the larger institutions of the upper Mississippi valley, which is in preparation and nearly ready for preliminary printing; and by the publication of surveys of the holdings of our universities in the several fields of investigation. This task is one of great difficulty and expense, for it must be the work of experts, not librarians but scholars, each working with his own field.

It is with the second of the scholar's difficulties which I wish to call particularly to your attention, because I believe that it is possible, with the facilities at our command, so to organize the collection of books that we shall be moving toward a definite end and that we may eventually hope to reach a condition under which a scholar, working in whatever field, may know where to go with a reasonable expectation of finding a library nearly if not quite complete for his purpose.

Where is there in the country anything like complete files of the publications of the scores of French archaeological, literary and historical societies, of the government publications of the smaller European or South American governments. Why should two institutions within a hundred miles of each other undertake the large expense involved in the purchase in duplicate of the less used sets, such as the Archives départementales, or the trade publications, which are the source for the history of American industry.

Except in three or four of our larger cities, in which there is some degree of limitation of field among the local libraries, our libraries are all purchasing almost without a knowledge or regard for what other institutions in their region already have or intend to buy.

Comparatively few scholars have the bibliographic sense, the willingness to prepare careful lists of needed books. When they do go to this labor, it is frequently useless because of the small amount of money available for purchase at any one time. In those rare cases when the capable bibliographer and the necessary funds are associated, the chances are that, after the collection is under way, the scholar is called to another institution and collecting in that particular field ceases. Our larger libraries, and many of our smaller ones, are full of ambitious collections which have been orphaned in this way and are now relatively useless.

In the institution which I last had the honor to serve, there was collected, for example, with a comparatively small expenditure, an apparatus for the study of seventeenth century English history. At the end of the last year the man whose scholarship was responsible for the collection ac-

cepted a position in another university, and the exigencies of the administration—and I am not calling them in any sense into question—made it necessary to replace him by another whose field was American history.

Similar examples might be cited in almost every institution.

In other words, our libraries are growing with little thought of any aim other than that of meeting the demands of the moment, and they are failing in any satisfactory recognition of their duty to provide for the larger needs of American scholarship. Faculties and their members come and go. The institution remains. No librarian is worth his salt if he fails to keep constantly before him, not only what his institution may become next year or five years hence, but, very clearly, what it may be in fifty or a hundred years. He should attempt, in so far as he is able, to direct its growth along other than haphazard and fortuitous lines.

Unfortunately librarians are, without the definite co-operation of the administration of which they are a part, able to do but little; and unless the administration sees the future of its library from the point of view I have attempted to outline, its progress will be halting.

If the institution should desire to undertake a conscious program of development it cannot plan wisely without co-ordinating its program with those of other universities within its region.

Any attempt at universality is of course vain. Except within limited fields, even the British Museum, the Bibliotheque Nationale, the Library of Congress and the Harvard University Library, cannot be consulted with any hope of finding a complete collection. The library must of necessity, if it aspires to be of the greatest usefulness to scholarship, limit its intensive collection (I am speaking of course not at all of the books needed for undergraduate study) to rigidly predetermined lines, followed consistently from year to year; and to make no attempt to compete in collection with other institutions within its region which have developed or are developing certain others.

Sometimes these lines may be determined more or less fortuitously. A university may have the good fortune to become possessed, by gift, of a splendid collection, such as the Wrenn library of eighteenth century literature at the University of Texas, or the Bancroft library of Pacific history at the University of California, or the White library of the French revolution and the famous Petrach collection at Cornell. In such cases its duty is clear. It must keep this collection not as something dead but as a living, working instrument for research, to which everything available, not yet represented within it, is added. The duty of surrounding institutions is equally clear. It would be foolish for the University of Minnesota to attempt to duplicate the collections of the University of Wisconsin in industrial history or for the latter to vie with the former in the field of seventeenth century English history.

In endeavoring to formulate into a practicable program the ideas which I have outlined it is evident.

1. That the country is too large and distances are too great to work out any such scheme on other than a regional basis. While books may be and are loaned between libraries, hundreds and thousands of miles apart, the scholar wants to consult ordinarily not one book but many, and he



must go to the place where the books are if he is to get the major advantage.

2. Such a scheme must involve, at its inception and throughout the years, the acceptance of the policy by the administrations of the co-operating institutions and their definite support of it by keeping on their respective staffs, in so far as they are able, men who are specialists in the fields accepted as their own.

3. A study of the existing resources for graduate instruction must be made so that it may be a matter of common knowledge among the scholars in each field what each institution has already collected and what their plans for the future are.

4. There must be a carefully studied and planned division of the field among the institutions concerned.

To accomplish this desirable and, I do not believe, wholly Utopian ideal, may I suggest that the executives of a group of institutions, such as those within two or three hundred miles of Chicago might agree that such a plan was worth trying. They would then form committees consisting of representatives of their several departments giving graduate instruction, English, Economics, Botany, History, etc., whose duty it should be, after a mature consideration of existing collections and of the possibilities of financial support, to accept tentatively, each for his own institution, certain specific phases of the larger field, to be developed in an intensive and complete way as fast as funds can be provided. The institutions with smaller financial support might accept but a single specific subject in each of the larger groups, while the larger institutions might agree to become responsible for several.

Such a survey would involve some time and money, but it is not impossible that one of the large foundations interested in promoting education might grant the necessary financial support.

When these departmental studies have been completed, their results should be co-ordinated by the executives and accepted by the governing boards as a matter of university policy to be supported by continuing appropriations; and, I repeat, in so far as possible, by retaining on the university staff specialists in the fields accepted.

I wish to make it perfectly clear that the policy which I am advocating is a positive and not a negative one. No institution can or should bind itself not to buy, to suit the immediate needs of work actually going on, books on any subject. This seems to me to be self-evident. It can, however, and this is a very different thing, agree to collect intensively on the lumber industry or on Wordsworth, on the Chartist movement or on gas engines, on folk-lore or on Goethe, on fungi or on French archaeology.

No one would be so foolish to expect one hundred per cent results for such a program. The world has very few examples of such success. I believe however that it will richly repay for the labor involved and that if this, or some similar plan, is adopted, our libraries will be moving together toward a definite aim and not, as at present, progressing each along a path which is constantly turning, toward an uncertain goal.

That the suggested program is difficult of accomplishment, I am fully aware, but so is almost everything that is worth while. I have never yet found, however, that I have reached any place for which I was unwilling to start, and difficulties which seem unsurmountable at a distance are frequently resolved when near at hand. (Applause).

*The President*—I am pleased to see that our United States Commissioner of Education has honored us with his presence this morning, and I am going to ask him if he will not say a few words to this body: Dr. Claxton. (Applause).



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